



# *The Older Gentleman*

*an original play  
by Max Sparber*

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# THE OLDER GENTLEMAN:

## An Original Play by Max Sparber

*(The year is 1962 and the location is Crete, Nebraska. Most of the action of the play will take place at Doane College, which is preparing for the return of one of its alumnus, film actor Robert Taylor, née Spangler Arlington Brugh. The rest of the action will take place at the house of the titular older gentleman. These changes should be represented by simple shifts in stage properties and furniture, but they should be precise in design: Doane should have an anonymous, functional, manufactured feel to it; the house of the older gentleman, in the meanwhile, should be redolent with faux glamour, a version of Hollywood high fashion of the forties done on the cheap.*

*The first scene in the play is set at the interior of a performing hall on the Doane campus. The stage is bare but for a podium, an upright piano — which will remain onstage for most of the play/ Also onstage are a PIANIST, and a BOY. The boy will likewise remain onstage throughout most of the play, with merely the scene shifting behind him. He sings:)*

BOY: Will there be love  
Will there be kisses  
What will there be when you're my misses  
Will you greet me  
With kisses and tea  
Or will you lock up  
And throw out the key  
It has been said that  
We are to wed  
Oh, what will it be?  
What will it be?

Say, is this joy  
Is this what bliss is  
Is this our life  
When you're my misses  
Say, will you sing  
When I bring my ring  
Or will you just scowl  
And toss out the thing  
You seem enraged  
That we are engaged  
What will it bring?  
What will it bring?

PIANIST: Good. Very good. But you say your voice hurts?

BOY: Sore, ma'am. After singing.

PIANIST: The song seems to be in your register. You're not straining for notes?

BOY: No, Mrs. Tollefson.

PIANIST: Well, keep up with the exercises I suggested. You will do that?

BOY: Yes.

PIANIST: Sometimes, a voice simply needs to develop.

BOY: Yes. But I worry that I will be hoarse.

PIANIST: Yes?

BOY: For the performance.

PIANIST: Ah, yes. Well, there are a few weeks yet. Keep up with the exercises.

BOY: I will.

PIANIST: And take care of your voice. No shouting. You're not much of a shouter, are you?

BOY: A shouter?

PIANIST: At sporting events?

BOY: No. No, not much.

PIANIST: Well, none at all, then. No shouting. And no smoking.

BOY: I don't.

PIANIST: Ugly habit. Roughs up the voice. You might take to wearing a scarf around your neck. Keep the throat warm.

BOY: I will.

PIANIST: *(After a beat.)* Tea.

BOY: Tea.

PIANIST: With honey in it. I find that to be a tremendous balm.

*(There is silence for a moment)*

PIANIST: But the exercises, mostly.

BOY: Yes. The exercises.

PIANIST: Perhaps you should do some now. In the meanwhile, I have a class to teach.

*(The pianist exits. The boy stands in silence for a moment, then begins a vocal exercise.)*

BOY: Mah mah mah. Me me me. Moh moh moh.

*(A COLLEGE CHUM appears now, from offstage, and as he speaks stagehands silently switch the furnishings. The scene is now a gym. The chum begins jumping rope. The boy sits himself on the floor and watches.)*

COLLEGE CHUM: I can't think who he is.

BOY: You've seen his movies.

COLLEGE CHUM: Sure. I know I have. I just can't think of what.

BOY: *Quo Vadis*.

COLLEGE CHUM: No.

BOY: You've seen *Quo Vadis*. They show it on television all the time. It's a big spectacle about the early Christians.

COLLEGE CHUM: Was he crucified upside down?

BOY: No. That was Simon Peter. Finlay Currie, I think. Robert Taylor was a Roman who fell in love with a Christian girl.

COLLEGE CHUM: I can't think of what he looked like. What else was he in?

BOY: Robert Taylor was in *The Detectives*. You've watched *The Detectives*, haven't you?

COLLEGE CHUM: Sure! Who did he play in *The Detectives*?

BOY: Matt Holbrook.

COLLEGE CHUM: The detective?

BOY: They were all detectives.

COLLEGE CHUM: Yeah, but, you know, the captain of the detectives.

BOY: Yeah. The star of the show. It was called “*The Detectives starring Robert Taylor*.”

COLLEGE CHUM: Hey, yeah. I remember. You sure seem to like him.

BOY: I don’t feel one way or the other about him. I just want to perform well.

COLLEGE CHUM: So he went to Doane, huh?

BOY: Yes. But he was called Spangler Brugh back then.

COLLEGE CHUM: What?

BOY: Spangler Arlington Brugh. It’s his real name.

COLLEGE CHUM: For noy feeling one way or the other, you know a lot about Robert Taylor.

BOY: I sort of grew up with him. In Filley. He and my mother went to high school together.

COLLEGE CHUM: In Filley?

BOY: Yes.

COLLEGE CHUM: Nebraska?

BOY: Yes.

COLLEGE CHUM: Where is that?

BOY: East of Beatrice.

COLLEGE CHUM: So that’s where Robert Taylor is from.

BOY: My mother said she had a terrible crush on him in high school. She still drags us to see all of his movies.

COLLEGE CHUM: And now you’re going to serenade him.

BOY: (*Startled*) Well, not exactly.

COLLEGE CHUM: Well, what would you call it?

BOY: I’m singing a song in a musical production when he comes to visit. It’s not the

same thing as, you know, serenading.

COLLEGE CHUM: It's a love song.

BOY: Well, it's not the same as standing outside his window with a ukulele. Besides, men don't sing love songs to other men.

COLLEGE CHUM: Not with voices like yours they don't.

BOY: What do you mean?

COLLEGE CHUM: Hoarse.

BOY: Oh, yes, I'm straining it somehow.

COLLEGE CHUM: Hm. *(Thinks for a moment)*. Tea. I hear.

*(The OLDER GENTLEMAN enters now. He is dressed in an elegant suit with a scarf tucked around his neck, a thin, movie-star moustache, a smoking jacket, and slippers. His gestures are flamboyant and exaggerated, and he speaks with an affected accent, as someone would who has been through extensive diction training.)*

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Tea?

BOY: *(Rising to talk to him.)* That's what everybody tells me.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Well, I suppose it wouldn't hurt. Warm up your throat, don't you know.

BOY: Does it help? I have been drinking a lot of tea.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: No. No, I don't imagine it would help much, either. Except where restroom duties are concerned. Wonderful diuretic, tea.

BOY: Well, I am supposed to sing in two weeks.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: For Robert Taylor.

BOY: *(Surprised.)* Yes.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: I had hoped you would say yes. How grand. Robert Taylor! Have you seen *Ivanhoe*?

BOY: Yes.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Did you like it?

BOY: It was all right.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: True. It didn't merit much comment. Poor Bobby. Wasn't really up to the task of playing a Medieval soldier, but still, he was so very handsome to look at, and the film itself was so utterly marvelous. I knew him, you know.

BOY: You knew Robert Taylor?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Somewhat. Hollywood is not so large a town, and we Nebraskans tend to clump up together. I put Dorothy Maguire on to a marvelous parfumery, and Henry Fonda and I share a tailor. Not Robert Taylor, of course. Ha ha.

BOY: You've been to Hollywood?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Oh, my dear boy, did Miss Tollefson tell you nothing about me when she passed my number along?

BOY: Just that you have experience as a voice coach.

OLDER GENTLEMEN: Yes I do. I do have that. I must admit, though, that I am surprised that the Tollefson woman gave you my name. She seems to disapprove.

BOY: Disapprove?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: You now how suspicious these rural sorts can be. Where are you from, by the way?

BOY: Filley.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Oh my goodness. Then you certainly *do* know. I would think Tollefson would have warned you away from me.

BOY: Well, she did say you were flamboyant.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Flamboyant. I suppose I should thank her for expressing herself kindly. Well, my boy, if you would like some help, I expect that I can give it. Two weeks should be plenty to iron out the roughness in your voice.

BOY: I don't have much money, I'm afraid. I can pay—

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Posh. I won't ask for money. Just take me with you to the performance. I would be delighted to see Bobby again. I have gotten so behind on my Hollywood news. Now come to the piano.

*(The older gentleman crosses to the piano, sits behind it. The boy follows him.)*



OLDER GENTLEMAN: Sing through each of these scales.

*(He plays through several scales, starting quite low and moving quite high. The boy sings, and as he does the older gentleman listens with a practiced ear.)*

OLDER GENTLEMAN: You have a good range. A nice vibrato as well. Subtle. So many singers warble through their songs like drunken pigeons. But your vibrato is not too pronounced. Have you sung before?

BOY: In school choir. And in church.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Your posture is terrible, however. We shall have to work on that. The wind doesn't pass through you properly, and it is giving your voice something of a reedy quality.

BOY: Is that what is causing my hoarseness?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: No. But, still, you don't want to be reedy for Robert Preston. When I was young, they made boys stand up straight. It is a good habit, and you must promise me to make it your habit. Do you promise?

BOY: Yes.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Good. How often can you come by?

BOY: How often should I come by?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Your performance is in two weeks?

BOY: Yes.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Oh, that Tollefson woman. She should have sent you here sooner instead of forcing tea down your throat. Can you come every day?

BOY: I ... every day?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Is it possible, or are you too busy with school?

BOY: Is it necessary?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: We have very limited time. We might be able to spare a day here or there if your schedule is such, but, yes, I would say it is absolutely necessary.

BOY: Then I will come every day.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: You do want to sound as good as possible for Robert Taylor, don't you?

BOY: Yes. And for my mother.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Your mother?

BOY: She will be attending as well.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: From Filley?

BOY: Yes. She is quite fond of Robert Taylor.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Yes. It is hard not to be.

*The COLLEGE CHUM returns with two desks, and he and the boy sit as the older gentleman exits. A PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER, a very severe-looking man with thick spectacles, appears behind them, wheeling in a metal AV cart with a 16mm projector on it. The lights flicker as though a movie were playing. In the background, the narration and soundtrack to Boys Beware, a 1961 educational film about homosexuality, is audible.*

PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER: The film is meant for high school students. I apologize if the content seems to be immature.

FILM SOUNDTRACK: Then, during lunch, Ralph showed him some pornographic pictures. Ralph knew he shouldn't be interested, but, well, he was curious. What Jimmy didn't know was that Ralph was sick. A sickness that was not visible like smallpox, but no less dangerous and contagious. A sickness of the mind. You see, Ralph was a homosexual.

PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER: The subject matter might be embarrassing. But the topic is important. At your age range, you are particularly susceptible. And those of you who are studying to be teachers, well, you might have students who could be at risk.

FILM SOUNDTRACK: The companionship, the praise, the friendly attitude dispelled any misgivings Mike might have had about going with a stranger. He probably never realized until too late that he was rising in the shadow of death. But sometime that evening, Mike Merrick traded his life for a newspaper headline.

PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER: When any of you visit Lincoln, or Omaha, or any other big city, you might find yourself in contact with an illegal, degenerate underground without knowing it. You might be invited to a small social gathering, or walk into a bar unawares, or find yourself in conversation with a stranger at a diner. As normal as these activities might seem, believe it or not, every one participating in them might be homosexual.

COLLEGE CHUM: (*Raising hand.*) Homosexual, sir?

PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER: I will pause the movie for a moment. (*He fiddles with the projector. The lights cease flickering.*) Homosexual, Mr. Swanson, is a psychological term for a sort of mental illness. To use utterly frank language, it describes men and women who have aberrant sexual interest in romantic partners of the same gender. Perhaps you have already heard about such people.

COLLEGE CHUM: Yes. But I haven't known what to call them.

PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER: You have no doubt heard some of the popular, slang words for the homosexual. Fairy, for example. Flit. Pansy. Am I correct?

COLLEGE CHUM: Yes, sir.

PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER: Homosexual is the proper term. Female homosexuals are sometimes called "lesbians." Let us return to the film. (*He starts the film again.*)

FILM SOUNDTRACK: Public restrooms can often be a hangout for the homosexual. Bobby and his friends hadn't noticed the man who had been in the restroom when they changed.

COLLEGE CHUM: (*Quietly, to boy.*) I saw a film like this in 6th grade.

BOY: You did?

COLLEGE CHUM: Yes. It was called *Dangerous Stranger*. You know, I couldn't wait to see it.

BOY: You couldn't?

COLLEGE CHUM: My older brother saw it the year before. And he had heard about it from older kids. They showed it for years. Everybody knew about the film. All year long, we kept saying, "Is this the week when we watch *Dangerous Stranger*?" The film was, like, legendary.

BOY: How was it?

COLLEGE CHUM: We talked about it for months. The film was confusing.

BOY: Why confusing?

COLLEGE CHUM: Well. (*Beat.*) The film was about strangers coming up to kids and offering them candy. And that was it. You might be in an alley, and a strange man would come up to you, and you were supposed to run. It was years later

that I figured out that the people were fairies.

**PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER:** Mr. Swanson, is there something you would like to share with the class?

**COLLEGE CHUM:** (*Dissembling.*) We were just talking and wondering, sir. If homosexuality is a mental illness, why don't homosexuals go to psychiatrists?

**PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER:** A good question again, Mr. Swanson. I will turn off the projector and answer your question. (*He turns off the projector.*) Some homosexuals do look for treatment. Some, however, do not, and try to fight their abnormal feelings by themselves, with varying degrees of success. And some do not believe there is anything wrong with them at all.

(*The older gentleman enters with the words, seating himself at the piano.*)

**OLDER GENTLEMAN:** Sing again, please.

**BOY:** (*Singing as the chum and teacher exit the stage.*)

Why do you taunt me angel  
Why do you tease me so  
There's a heaven waiting inside your arms  
But you shake your heads and say  
Tut, tut, no no

How long will you refuse me  
How long will you tell me to go  
I'd follow you to the ends of the earth  
But you shake your head and say  
Tut, tut, no no.

**OLDER GENTLEMAN:** Ah! Do you hear it?

**BOY:** Do I hear?

**OLDER GENTLEMAN:** In the lower notes?

**BOY:** What is it?

**OLDER GENTLEMAN:** *Coup de glotte.* The stroke of your glottis is too harsh. You are exploding air out of your lungs with too much force on the lower notes. It is causing a shock to your vocal chords.

**BOY:** Is that what is causing the hoarseness?

**OLDER GENTLEMAN:** I am sure of it. You are probably also using the root of your tongue to depress your larynx. Do you thrust your jaw out when you sing low

notes?

BOY: I don't know.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Sing one.

BOY: Tut, tut, no no. (*Surprised.*) I do!

OLDER GENTLEMAN: (*Spreading hands triumphantly.*) Ah. I expected as much, Glottal shock is common in singers who haven't received formal training.

BOY: You can fix it?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: There are exercises, yes; It is easy to correct. We shall have to fill the two weeks with them, though, and we have already lost a day just finding the problem. Do you know, Barrymore had the same problem?

BOY: Who?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Barrymore. John Barrymore. The Great Profile. Although I would have called him "The Great Voice," after he fixed his glottal shock, of course. A little before your time, I'm afraid. He died the year I entered the army.

BOY: When was that?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: 1942. 3rd Infantry. We smashed our way from Casablanca to Berchtesgarden. I would show you my medals, but I am bored with them myself. Anyway, I am sure you have seen enough medals. Your father must have some.

BOY: No. He had flat feet instead.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Well, in the end he is probably better off. Just before we left for war, many of us who lived in Omaha went to the Black Diamond, which was a bar we used to frequent. We hung our hats by the rafters, promising to recover them when we came back. Many of the hats were never recovered. And I am sure your father supported the war effort at home, anyway.

BOY: He started a mail order orthopedic shoe business.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: There! Many soldiers came back with special needs, orthopedically speaking. I myself brought home a slight limp, as I am sure you have noticed. A bit of shrapnel as a souvenir, a going home present from the Wehrmacht.

BOY: I'm thinking of going into the army myself.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Not much call for singers in the military. Look into the USO.

BOY: Oh, I don't mean as a singer.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: I know. I was teasing. What are you studying?

BOY: Well, I'm studying to be a primary education teacher.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Not much call for that, either, I'm afraid.

BOY: Well, I wouldn't start that job until after the Army. *(Beat.)* Teasing again.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Yes. Well, good luck to you. It's a great way to see the world. Robert Taylor was in the navy, you know. He directed training films. And you know what else?

BOY: What?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: His degree was in music. He was a cellist. I'd tell you to hang your hat at the Black Diamond before you go off to the army, boy, but it's probably not your sort of bar.

*(The pianist emerges, and seats herself at the piano as the older gentleman graciously exits.)*

PIANIST: Your voice certain sounds better.

BOY: I think the exercises are working.

PIANIST: My exercises?

BOY: Well, yes. To an extent. But also the exercises of my tutor.

PIANIST: Oh. Ah. Yes. Well, good. You have a lovely natural singing voice, and this is a lovely auditorium to sing in. It's quite old, don't you know?

BOY: Yes?

PIANIST: 1902. Prairie School. Robert Taylor played cello here. Right here on this spot. Before my time, of course. Sing again.

BOY: I could drown in this dream of love  
I fall down and there's no hope of rising  
I could drown in this dream of love  
Of you, of you, of you  
Clouds roll by and I start a-falling  
Will I sigh as I plummet past your window

Clouds roll by as I start a-falling  
For you, for you, for you

PIANIST: Nice. Very lovely. Yes. We shall have quite a show for Mr. Taylor when he comes, and, I must say, I am quite excited.

BOY: My tutor knows Robert Taylor.

PIANIST: He ... No, don't be silly.

BOY: Yes. He said they spent time together in Hollywood.

PIANIST: Oh, I find that unlikely. Perhaps professionally, but not as friends.

BOY: Well, not as friends, no. But he said they socialized. Gossiped.

PIANIST: That's silly. He's just boasting.

BOY: Silly? Why?

PIANIST: I honestly doubt that Robert Taylor has the time for a twittering old fool like your tutor. Mr. Taylor is the son of a doctor. He studied medicine himself! He was a soldier. He testified before congress.

BOY: Oh.

PIANIST: You don't understand, and that's fine. I will just say that Robert Taylor is one sort of man, and has one sort of group of friends, and your tutor is another sort of man, and has a different group of friends. Let us leave it at that.

BOY: All right.

PIANIST: (*Stares hard at the boy.*) How has your tutor been treating you?

BOY: He's very strict. But he has helped a lot.

PIANIST: He hasn't been overly familiar?

BOY: What do you mean?

PIANIST: He hasn't offered you alcohol, for example?

BOY: Alcohol? No.

PIANIST: Does he talk to you much?

BOY: Not much.

PIANIST: Perhaps he shouldn't at all. Can I give you some advice?

BOY: Yes, ma'am.

PIANIST: Go, take your vocal lessons from him. But don't spend much time talking to him. I am told he is a very good vocal coach, which is why I gave you his number. But if he tries to be friendly beyond being a vocal coach, thank him and go your merry way. Will you agree to that?

BOY: But why?

PIANIST: He is a silly man. He has strange qualities. I would prefer not to go into it, but, please trust me, he is not a friend you want to make. In fact, I would rather you not go to see him alone.

BOY: Oh?

PIANIST: Take a friend next time.

BOY: Are you serious, Mrs. Tollefson? You talk as though he is dangerous.

PIANIST: Sometimes excessive silliness can be dangerous. You will understand when you are older. Let's not talk about this anymore. Just tell me that you will bring somebody with you.

BOY: Really?

PIANIST: My goodness, yes. Promise me.

BOY: All right, Mrs. Tollefson.

*(The college chum enters, and the older gentleman, as the pianist leaves. The older gentleman holds a silver tea tray with two cups.)*

OLDER GENTLEMAN: If I had known you were bringing a guest, I would have made more tea. Well, I will give up my cup.

BOY: Please, no. He can have my cup of tea.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Truly?

BOY: I have had enough tea.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: *(Laughs.)* I imagine you have. And to what do I owe this unexpected extra visitor?



COLLEGE CHUM: We're going to Lincoln to see a movie later. I asked if I could tag along rather than wait up.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: How fun! What movie are you planning to see?

COLLEGE CHUM: *How the West Was Won*.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: With Henry Fonda! Yes, that's excellent. I saw it last week. I particularly liked Richard Widmark. Did you ever see *Kiss of Death*?

BOY: No.

COLLEGE CHUM: No.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Oh, he is so terrifying in it! He played a giggling killer, and at one point he throws a woman in a wheelchair down a flight of stairs. I imagine your father would disapprove: One less customer for orthopedic shoes.

BOY: Have you met Richard Widmark?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Richard and I have shared many a drink. You know, he's a Midwestern boy. He was born in Minnesota!

COLLEGE CHUM: You've had drinks with Richard Widmark?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: We worked for the same studio on many occasions, and he didn't like to drink alone. He once asked me to take him to my favorite bar, but it was the Bijou, and I couldn't take him there.

COLLEGE CHUM: Why not?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Well, the Bijou has a sort of specialized clientele. It is very déclassé, very, well, working class, and rough. There are all sorts of people there that Richard would not want to be in the company of, despite his tendency to play tough guys in films.

BOY: There were criminals in the bar?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Of a sort. But Cary Grant is fond of it too, as is Gary Cooper, so how terrible could it be, really? Although they would simply have died if anyone had ever snapped their photo at the Bijou. The tabloids can be merciless. Utterly merciless.

BOY: Why did you leave Hollywood?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: I didn't want to. Me and my friend Andy made a good living out there. We shared a house with a pool. A beautiful little stucco thing, painted

pink, just off La Cienega. But, well, mother got sick, and I decided to move back to Crete to tend to her. Andy kept the stucco and the pool and the poodle, and I got this. (*Gestures at the house.*) Mother willed it to me. I've redecorated, of course. Mother had a taste for little statuettes of ponies that I did not share, although I have kept two of them. There, on the mantle, next to her urn. (*Beat.*) Oh, where are my manners? I should offer guests some cookies as well. I know you're off tea, but some cookies?

BOY: Sure. That sounds great.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: I will fetch them at once. Chocolate chip. I bake them myself, and I have been waiting for the opportunity to share them. But afterward we must begun practice. I'll be just a minute.

(*The older gentleman exits. After a moment, the college chum turns to the boy.*)

COLLEGE CHUM: So, do you think he is one?

BOY: What?

COLLEGE CHUM: A fairy?

BOY: (*Startled.*) Are you serious?

COLLEGE CHUM: Yes. He seems like a fairy to me. Has he tried anything with you?

BOY: What sort of things?

COLLEGE CHUM: Has he tried to touch you?

BOY: No. No, he's been very nice, very professional. This has been the longest talk we have had. Usually he just has me practice vocal exercises.

COLLEGE CHUM: Well, maybe he isn't a flit. I could have sworn he was, though. Hadn't that even occurred to you?

BOY: No. He's a war hero, you know.

COLLEGE CHUM: Really?

BOY: He's got a piece of German shrapnel in his leg. They don't let homosexuals in the army, do they?

COLLEGE CHUM: No, I think they don't. Well, you can never tell who is what. Maybe he's just eccentric.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: (*Returning.*) Cookies! I hope you boys have managed to keep

yourself amused while I was in the other room.

*(A RECRUITMENT OFFICER enters and seats himself. He speaks to the boy as the others leave.)*

**RECRUITMENT OFFICER:** There are advantages to enlisting in the army, son. Do you know your draft status?

**BOY:** 1A.

**RECRUITMENT OFFICER:** I'm not surprised. You look like a solid young man, and, frankly, the army could use you. As an enlisted soldier, you can pick your training. Soldiers who are drafted get no such privilege. Additionally, your enlistment would only be for three years. For draftees, it's four. When do you graduate?

**BOY:** The summer after this one.

**RECRUITMENT OFFICER:** Well, there is no reason not to discuss it now, even if you do not enter the army until the summer of 1964. What is your interest in the military?

**BOY:** Travel, for one.

**RECRUITMENT OFFICER:** We get that a lot. There are certainly opportunities for travel. The army currently has bases in Germany, The Philippines, Guam, Honolulu. We even have 4,000 soldiers in Indochina, although not all of them are army, of course. Is there any place you would particularly like to go?

**BOY:** Do you have a base in Los Angeles?

**RECRUITMENT OFFICER:** Los Alamitos, a joint forces training center. You interested in palm trees and movie stars, son?

**BOY:** Honestly, I'm interested in just about anything, sir. I haven't been further west than Colorado.

**RECRUITMENT OFFICER:** You can go as far west as you like in the army, son. As far east as well. We've even had soldiers in the South Pole since last year, if you can believe it. Now, do you have any questions about the army, son?

**BOY:** Well, I have one.

**RECRUITMENT OFFICER:** Well, all right. I'm here to answer questions.

**BOY:** I have heard that you don't allow homosexuals in the army.

**RECRUITMENT OFFICER:** *(After a beat.)* That's true, son. Why do you want to

know?

BOY: It's just something I had heard.

RECRUITMENT OFFICER: Well, you don't need to worry about sharing your showers or bunks with a homosexual, son. Before people even enter the army, we ask them, right on their application, if they are homosexual.

BOY: Does anybody ever answer yes?

RECRUITMENT OFFICER: *(Laughs.)* No. I have never heard of anyone answering yes. I don't reckon homosexuals have much interest in joining the army, and the army don't want them anyway. You know, anybody with a history of mental illness, well, it wouldn't be a good idea to let them near a gun, would it?

BOY: No.

RECRUITMENT OFFICER: And if a man has strange feelings about other men — well, it wouldn't really do to let him around a lot of other men, would it?

BOY: No.

RECRUITMENT OFFICER: No.

BOY: What if a homosexual lied to you and did get into the army?

RECRUITMENT OFFICER: Well, if they tried any funny business, they would go to jail. And, after that, they'd get a dishonorable discharge, which would follow them for the rest of their lives. So it wouldn't be very smart of a fairy to try to get in the army, would it?

BOY: No.

RECRUITMENT OFFICER: Now, do you have any questions about the army that isn't about homosexuals?

*(A WOMAN enters and brings with her a table, the sort popular at restaurants. She sits at it and the boy crosses to her, sitting opposite. The recruitment officer exits.)*

BOY: So father won't be coming?

WOMAN: No. He must work on taxes. And he doesn't like this sort of thing, you know. But I will be there, of course. When did you get your hair cut last?

BOY: A few weeks ago.

WOMAN: Let me give you a few dollars before I go. It is getting a little unkempt. You

have such a handsome face. We don't want it hidden by girlish curls.

BOY: Well, I haven't started growing curls yet, mother.

WOMAN: You're such a handsome boy. Don't spend all your time at college chasing after girls.

BOY: You don't need to worry about that, mother.

WOMAN: I like to worry about it. Is there anyone special in you life just now? Don't be ashamed to tell your mother.

BOY: I've been very busy with school, mother, and with rehearsals. I haven't had time for that.

WOMAN: No steady girl on your arm? Don't tell me you haven't been dating. With your face, the girls should be throwing themselves at you.

BOY: We go out as a gang sometimes. The girls and my friends.

WOMAN: Well, when you get the moment, ask one of these girls to go out without the gang. You don't want to end up an old bachelor, do you?

BOY: I suppose I don't, mother. Oh, look!

*(The older gentleman enters.)*

BOY: That's my singing tutor!

WOMAN: You should call him over. Maybe he would like to join us.

BOY: *(Waving.)* Mr. De Silva!

*(The older gentleman sees them, crosses.)*

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Well, good evening, Mr. Krause.

BOY: Mr. De Silva, this is my mother. Mother, this is my singing tutor, Mr. De Silva.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Mrs. Krause.

WOMAN: My son has told me that you have done wonders for his singing voice.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: It's a fine voice to begin with, Mrs. Krause. I just made sure he was using it properly.

WOMAN: What brings you into Lincoln, Mr. De Silva?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: I was just taking in a movie. *Lolita* at the Joyo.

WOMAN: My goodness. How was that?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Very interesting. Have you read the book?

WOMAN: No, but I have certainly heard it talked about. How ever did they make it into a movie, I wonder?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Well, they couldn't have made the book directly into a movie, but the film had many details from the book. And it kept the deliciously sardonic tone of the book. I am a very great fan of an older film by the same director called *The Killing*.

WOMAN: Oh! I saw that! With Sterling Hayden! (*Looks around.*) Oh, where are my manners! Are you meeting someone, Mr. De Silva, or would you like to join us for dinner. We haven't ordered yet.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: I am not meeting anyone. But I wouldn't dream of intruding.

WOMAN: It's no intrusion. By all means, have a seat.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: (*Sitting.*) And what brings you to Lincoln, Mrs. Krause?

WOMAN: My mother was from Lincoln, Mr. De Silva. She's buried here, right next to Theodore Epp.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Theodore Epp?

WOMAN: From the "Back to the Bible" radio show.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Oh, yes. I remember now. "Tell me the old, old storey of Jesus and his love." Yes, I have heard that show a few times.

WOMAN: I visit my mother every month, and since junior here started attending Doane, we have made it a tradition to eat at King's when I do.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: What a lovely tradition! I am sure he has been telling you all sorts of stories about the school's preparations for Robert Taylor's return.

WOMAN: He has been telling me that he has been too busy to date. When you came in, I was just warning him that if he is not careful, he will end up an older bachelor.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: A good warning. I am an older bachelor myself, and I cannot recommend it.

WOMAN: Oh! I am sorry, Mr. De Silva. I should have thought before I opened your mouth. I just saw the ring on your finger and I thought ...

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Oh, you thought right. I was married.

BOY: You were?

WOMAN: Sure he was! I would be surprised if you hadn't been, Mr. De Silva. You've got a very elegant, charming quality about you that I am sure many women have simply gone made for.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Well, thank you, Mrs. Krause. Unfortunately, elegance and charm is not enough to make a marriage. We have been apart for 15 years, although we were never formally divorced. She and my daughter live in Kansas City.

WOMAN: Oh! You have a daughter! I hope you get to see her, Mr. De Silva. A growing girl needs a man in her life that she can count on.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: You are right, of course. I see her as often as I can, but I wish it were more often. It is difficult to travel to Kansas City as often as I should, particularly since I was a resident of Hollywood up until three years ago.

WOMAN: My son mentioned the fact. You must have so many interesting stories!

BOY: He knew Robert Taylor.

WOMAN: Really! I went to school with him, back when he was Spangler Brugh.

OLDER GENTLEMAN: What was he like back then?

WOMAN: Very nice looking. A very neat, soft-spoken young man. I sat behind him in many classes, and I found it awfully distracting. What was he like when you knew him?

OLDER GENTLEMAN: Still distracting.

*(A CIVICS TEACHER enters now.)*

CIVICS TEACHER: Mr. Krause. Will you stand and read to the class? From where I have underlined.

*(The boy rises as the woman and the older gentleman exit. The civics teacher hands him a newspaper, and the boy reads.)*

THE BOY: "There is no greater threat to democracy today than the insidious, creeping

Red Menace.”

**CIVICS TEACHER:** Stop right there. The quote you just read is the first sentence of a letter to the editor in this morning’s newspaper. Can you tell the class what the writer means by the “Red Menace,” Mr. Krause?

**THE BOY:** Communism, sir.

**CIVICS TEACHER:** Communism, yes, Mr. Krause. And please read the name of the author of the letter, Mr. Krause.

**THE BOY:** Irwin Fielder, Sfc., US Army, Company A.

**CIVICS TEACHER:** I won’t have you read the entire letter, Mr. Krause. But in it Master Sergeant Fielder explains that he is a veteran of the Korean conflict. Why do you think he would be writing about communism now? After all, we fought the communists in Korea 10 years ago, and 10 years is a long time. And why should we worry about communism anyway — I mean, Russia, China, Korea — they are so far away. Don’t you agree, Mr. Krause?

**THE BOY:** Well, there are communists in Cuba.

**CIVICS TEACHER:** Yes there are. In fact, those of you who have following the news might have heard about a little thing called an embargo. Have you been following the news, Mr. Krause?

**THE BOY:** Yes. President Kennedy is proposing that we refuse to buy good made in Cuba.

**CIVICS TEACHER:** More than that, Mr. Krause, he is proposing that we as a nation refuse to buy any goods from anywhere in the world made from or containing Cuban material. Why would he do that?

**THE BOY:** So that we don’t provide economic support for a communist country?

**CIVICS TEACHER:** But why should we care? Cuba is a very little Caribbean island, after all. If they want to be communists, why shouldn’t we let them?

**THE BOY:** I don’t know, sir.

**CIVICS TEACHER:** Do you have any opinion on the subject?

**THE BOY:** I do not, sir.

**CIVICS TEACHER:** Well, that’s the subject of our discussion today, so hopefully by the end of the class you will be able to answer that question, Mr. Krause. Because you cannot understand current events without understanding the threat



of communism — what our letter-writer called the “insidious, creeping Red Menace” — and what our country is doing to stem that menace.

*(The older gentleman enter, sits at the piano.)*

**OLDER GENTLEMAN:** Sing it again, please.

**THE BOY:** *(Hands the newspaper back to the civics teacher, who exits.)*

I'm bewildered and I'm startled  
Is this just the wine  
Did I hear that you adore me  
Could it be your mine

We've both drunk a little too much  
And won't be invited again any time soon  
I've lost my hat and your purse string's open  
Now is a good time to serenade the moon  
I've acted the fool, I act it often  
My hair's a mess and I sing off tune  
If it makes you smile I'll act the fool dear  
If it makes you smile I will serenade the moon.

**OLD GENTLEMAN:** Fine, fine. You must relax your jaw more, but you're improving.  
Are the exercises helping.

**THE BOY:** I haven't felt hoarse all week. Do you have exercises for nerves?

**OLD GENTLEMAN:** You're nervous about performing.

**THE BOY:** Yes. Very.

**OLD GENTLEMAN:** I can't help you with that. Some of my friends in Hollywood left the theater because they couldn't get over stage fright. They could act in front of a camera with no problems, but to perform live, onstage, in front of an audience — it was simply too much. I told them they left the theater for the wrong reason.

**THE BOY:** What was the right reason?

**OLD GENTLEMAN:** Because movies pay so much better. Look, I was under contract to Paramount, and all I did was lead actors in some simple vocal exercises. I did that for 10 years, and I would be surprised if I am not the richest man in Crete,

**THE BOY:** Do you plan to go back?

**OLD GENTLEMAN:** I don't think so.

THE BOY: Why not?

OLD GENTLEMAN: That's a very hard question for me to answer completely. Let me ask you a question. What do you think of the song that you just sang?

THE BOY: It has been very helpful with my vocal exercises.

OLD GENTLEMAN: But do you like it?

THE BOY: I don't know.

OLD GENTLEMAN: Yes, I've noticed that you don't seem to have strong opinions about things in one way or the other. Let me rephrase the question — do you dislike the song?

THE BOY: No.

OLD GENTLEMAN: I am glad of that, because I wrote it.

THE BOY: You did?

OLD GENTLEMAN: Well, you can't be a vocal coach without eventually trying your hand at songwriting. When I moved out to Hollywood, it was still possible to bump into Cole Porter or Irving Berlin in the studio cantina. I suppose I always aspired to write songs like they did. Not much of a market for it, but I find it helps me express my feelings. That particular song I wrote about someone I fell in love with.

THE BOY: Yes?

OLD GENTLEMAN: It's a sort of gimmick. You fall in love, you write a song, you sing it to the object of your affections, and sometimes they fall in love right back.

THE BOY: Did it work?

OLD GENTLEMAN: For a little while. But in Hollywood, it is easy to get your heart broken. And I have dozens of such songs, and every one represents a broken heart. So when I moved back to Crete, after my mother died, I thought I would just stay here and be a rich local eccentric, and I would not get my heart broken any more. You don't mind that I am telling you this?

THE BOY: No.

OLD GENTLEMAN: You're young, and to hear your mother tell it, don't date much. When you're older, and have been on at least a few dates, you might understand this. It is very easy for a person to get lonely, and, no matter how many times a heart gets broken, it wants to love again. Perhaps I can starve my stupid heart

into submission in Crete.

**THE BOY:** I wouldn't give up hope. Maybe you will meet a nice spinster and fall in love again. Maybe an old maid working at a library.

**OLD GENTLEMAN:** Oh, now you're teasing me? I wouldn't worry about that. I am not interested in old maids. And if I do fall in love with some librarian, perhaps there is something I can do about it. Perhaps there is some sort of surgery.

**THE BOY:** Surgery? *(Laughing.)* Are there doctors who will remove somebody's heart?

**OLD GENTLEMAN:** Well, not exactly, Mr. Teasy. Perhaps one day I shall tell you.

*(The pianist enters now, with ROBERT TAYLOR.)*

**PIANIST:** Mr. Krause, I would like you to meet Robert Taylor. Mr. Taylor, This is Michael Krause, Jr. He will be our featured vocalist tonight.

**ROBERT TAYLOR:** *(Extends hand. The older gentleman exits.)* Mr. Krause. Excited about tonight?

**THE BOY:** *(Shaking hand.)* Nervous.

**ROBERT TAYLOR:** I understand. When I used to play cello on this stage, I would feel like I was going to throw up.

**PIANIST:** Mr. Taylor is taking a tour of the campus this afternoon, Mr. Krause. He asked if he could peek in on rehearsal.

**ROBERT TAYLOR:** If you don't mind.

**THE BOY:** I don't mind.

**ROBERT TAYLOR:** What are you working on?

**THE BOY:** A song for the production.

**ROBERT TAYLOR:** Can I hear it?

**PIANISTS:** You don't mind, do you, Mr. Krause?

**THE BOY:** No. *(Singing.)*  
Will there be love  
Will there be kisses  
What will there be when you're my misses  
Will you greet me  
With kisses and tea

Or will you lock up  
And throw out the key  
It has been said that  
We are to wed  
Oh, what will it be?  
What will it be?

Say, is this joy  
Is this what bliss is  
Is this our life  
When you're my misses  
Say, will you sing  
When I bring my ring  
Or will you just scowl  
And toss out the thing  
You seem enraged  
That we are engaged  
What will it bring?  
What will it bring?

**ROBERT TAYLOR:** (*Applauding.*) Very nice! You've obviously been practicing very hard.

**THE BOY:** In fact, I have been studying with an acquaintance of yours from Hollywood.

**ROBERT TAYLOR:** You have?

**PIANIST:** Oh, now, Mr. Krause. I don't think Mr. Taylor —

**ROBERT TAYLOR:** Who have you been studying with?

**PIANIST:** Abraham De Silva.

**ROBERT TAYLOR:** Abraham De Silva! That's right — I forgot he was from Nebraska.

**PIANIST:** You knew him?

**ROBERT TAYLOR:** Well, we had mutual friends. Abraham De Silva and Henry Fonda used to play cards together every weekend. And, of course, we saw each other at the studio. How is Abe?

**THE BOY:** Good.

**ROBERT TAYLOR:** I'm glad to hear that. He left Hollywood to take care of his mother, didn't he?

THE BOY: Yes. She passed away, though.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, I hope he will be coming tonight. He seemed quote depressed last time I saw him, so it will be good to see him in better spirits.

*(The older gentleman enters now, dressed in a shiny gold suit, holding a drink, obviously a little drunk.)*

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Bobby!

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, Abe! I heard you might be here tonight. *·(Others enter, dressed in evening clothes, milling about holding drinks.)* Look at your suit!

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Less flamboyant than you're used to?

ROBERT TAYLOR: Well, you did have that red silk double-breasted suit.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Well, Crete isn't Hollywood. You need to dress down a little in Nebraska.

ROBERT TAYLOR: You must be very proud of your student.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Didn't he sing magnificently? He's a little song bird.

THE BOY: Thank you.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Wasn't he handsome up there? Every eye in the Conservatory was on him. That must have been strange for you, Bobby. *(To the boy.)* Usually *he's* the center of attention.

ROBERT TAYLOR: It was a welcome change.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: So, how is the old gang? *(At this moment, the women, the boy's mother, enters.)*

ROBERT TAYLOR: Everybody is well. Of course, you must have heard about Andrew.

THE OLD GENTLEMAN: Andrew? No. I haven't been in touch with anybody for quite a while.

THE WOMAN: *(Crossing to the boy, applauding.)* Bravo! Bravo!

THE BOY: Thank you, mother.

THE WOMAN: You were magnificent. Absolutely magnificent! Doesn't everybody agree?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: You should be very proud of your son, Mrs. Krause.

ROBERT TAYLOR: We were just saying that he stole all the attention from me tonight. You are Mr. Krause's mother?

THE BOY: I didn't get a chance to tell you earlier, Mr. Taylor. We are from Filley.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Oh, my goodness. Then I probably already know your mother.  
(*He looks at her closely.*) From school? Tell me we weren't in the same class together.

THE WOMAN: (*Thrilled.*) We were!

ROBERT TAYLOR: What's your maiden name?

THE WOMAN: Kurtz.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Not Lois Kurtz?

THE WOMAN: Yes!

ROBERT TAYLOR: (*To the boy.*) How many more of my acquaintances do you know?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Excuse me, Bobby. You were going to tell me something about Andrew.

ROBERT TAYLOR: I'm not sure I should be the one to tell you, Abe.

THE WOMAN: We even went on a date once!

THE BOY: You did?

ROBERT TAYLOR: I remember, Lois. We bussed to Omaha with a gang of other kids and went to the Orpheum. What did we see?

THE WOMAN: Oh, Mamie Smith. Butter Beans and Susie. A bunch of acts.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: (*Quietly.*) I have been out of touch, Bob. I really would appreciate it if you told me.

ROBERT TAYLOR: There was an accident, Abe.

THE WOMAN: The Rhythms Pals.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Lois, may I interrupt you for a moment?

THE WOMAN: Certainly.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Abe, there was an auto accident. Andrew Swerved wrong driving down from the Hills. He had been drinking. I'm sorry, but I'm afraid he's dead.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: When?

ROBERT TAYLOR: A year ago. I can't imagine why nobody told you.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: *(Stunned.)* Well. It didn't end very well for us.

ROBERT TAYLOR: I'm really very sorry, Abe.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Well, thank you for telling me, Bobby. It wasn't my intention to put you in an awkward spot like that.

ROBERT TAYLOR: Are you all right?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Stunned. I think I will step out and get some air.

ROBERT TAYLOR: All right. Be sure to say something to me before you go. I would hate to leave without a goodbye to you.

*(The older gentleman leaves. The woman looks on, flabbergasted.)*

THE WOMAN: Oh, my goodness!

ROBERT TAYLOR: A ... mutual friend. They were roommates. *(Suddenly, urgently.)* Listen, Mr. Krause, would you do me a favor and look after Abe for a moment. *(The boy nods, exits.)*

THE WOMAN: My goodness. What a shock for him!

*(Now the stage clears of actors, set, and properties. The Older Gentleman returns to the stage, staggering slightly, a dull expression on his face. He pauses and looks up into the air.)*

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Have you ever looked at the sky from the observatory? *(A beat.)* I know you're here, Mr. Krause.

*(The boy emerges. He crosses to the older gentleman sheepishly.)*

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: *(Gently.)* Answer my question.

THE BOY: Yes.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: What did you think of the view?

THE BOY: I don't know.

**THE OLDER GENTLEMAN:** Of course you don't. I looked through the telescope, once. When I was a boy here in Crete. Our elementary class would sometimes take day trips. Once we came to Doane and everybody looked through the telescope. What is its name?

**THE BOY:** The Boswell Observatory.

**THE OLDER GENTLEMAN:** Boswell. Yes. We came at noon and watched the time ball drop. It's not in use anymore. It was a big metal ball that would drop down a pole every day at noon. You could see it everywhere in Crete. Afterward, we took turns looking through the telescope. All we could see was blue, of course, because it was daytime, but our teacher told us that at night you could see into space for a million miles. Have you looked through the telescope at night?

**THE BOY:** Yes.

**THE OLDER GENTLEMAN:** Did you see for a million miles?

**THE BOY:** I saw the big dipper. That must be at least a million miles away.

**THE OLDER GENTLEMAN:** A million miles. That's how far I wanted to get away from Doane. I moved to Omaha when I was 16, you know. Sold furniture. I took singing lessons as night. But Omaha isn't a million miles away, is it?

**THE BOY:** No.

**THE OLDER GENTLEMAN:** No. When I went to the army, I went to Casablanca. You know Casablanca? Like in the movie?

**THE BOY:** Yes.

**THE OLDER GENTLEMAN:** It's in Morocco, which might as well be a million miles away. When I came back, with shrapnel in my leg, I figured that I had gone too far. Hollywood seemed just far enough. Didn't figure I would be coming back here.

**THE BOY:** Are you all right?

**THE OLDER GENTLEMAN:** No. Andrew was my lover in Hollywood. You must have figured that out.

**THE BOY:** No. I wondered, though.

**THE OLDER GENTLEMAN:** There you have it. Here it is, on the night of your public triumph, and you find out your tutor is mentally ill, and you watch his sick heart get broken again. You know, I think you're ready for opera. *(Beat.)*



Homosexuality isn't frowned on in Hollywood like it is here, you know. Or, at least, people aren't as openly disapproving. Look at Robert Taylor. He named names before the House of Un-American Activity Committees. Apparently he hates communists. And yet he's very cordial to an old faggot like me.

THE BOY: Does he know?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: (*Sharply.*) Of course he knows. He's not a naive lump like you. (*Pause.*) I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be short. You're a very quiet boy. Do you know that?

THE BOY: Yes.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: You're not quick with an opinion either. Either you don't think very much about anything at all, or you play your cards close to your vest. For example, looking at you right now, I can't imagine what you think about me.

THE BOY: What do you mean?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: I'm a queer, boy. You must have some sort of opinion about that. Mustn't you? Honestly, I can't believe that you are so dull that you don't. So, do your old tutor a favor, and share with me what you are thinking right now.

THE BOY: (*After a long pause.*) I'm wondering if I am like you.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: I'm going to sit down on the ground. You don't mind, do you. Usually, it is polite to tell someone to sit down before you tell them something like that. (*He sits down.*) Do you know what you are saying to me?

THE BOY: Yes.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Then I pity you. I spent my life wishing I didn't have these feelings. I have a wife and a child I will never see again because of it. And it is not like we mentally ill are capable of terrific relationships with each other, either. I have dozens of songs for dozens of broken hearts, boy, and I hoped in Crete my heart would never break again.

THE BOY: Is there a cure?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: There are a few. I've tried shrinks. Maybe you might have some luck with them. I didn't. I have, when I have felt the least sympathy for my conditions, considered contacting a specific doctor. He travels the country in a camper van outfitted for surgery. He can take away these desires.

THE BOY: How?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: With an ice pick, if you can believe it. Right through the tear duct and into the brain. A quick couple of jabs, and it's over, and all you have is two black eyes and a headache.

THE BOY: Are you talking about a lobotomy?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: I've looked into it, boy. Your memories, your ability to reason, your personality — they all remain intact. But you lose your desires. And I have often wanted to lose mine. I often have wanted to feel nothing. I feel that way right now.

THE BOY: You wouldn't really, would you?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Would I? I expect eventually I shall. You know, your prediction is probably right. Sooner or later I will fall in love with a spinster librarian, but, in this case, the spinster will be a Marty rather than a Marian. And it will go bad, as it always does, and people will talk, as people in small towns always do, and I will be alone in my dead mother's house. And I will not be able to stand it, and I will make a phone call. A camper van will arrive, and I will spend the rest of my life in that house, supported by my savings, needing nothing and, more importantly, wanting nothing. It will happen, boy — it's a foregone conclusion. But it could be worse.

THE BOY: Do you really think it could be worse?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: I could get drunk and decide to swerve off the road one night. Andrew wasn't the first faggot to think of that, and I am sure he won't be the last. At least my suicide plans leave me alive. And, boy, let me suggest to you that you make your suicide plans now. This is not the sort of thing that should be improvised at the last moment.

THE BOY: May I sit down?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: It's your campus.

*(The boy sits.)*

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: I shouldn't be surprised as I am, boy. After all, I can't be the only fairy to come out of Crete, Nebraska. You've got such a quiet, angelic quality to you, though. You didn't seem like you thought about romance one way or the other. You didn't seem like you thought about anything at all, for that matter, *(Sourly.)* Ah, what a wretched evening. What a conversation to have after you recital!

THE BOY: My father suspects.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Eh?

THE BOY: It is why he isn't here tonight. He never came to any of the school plays I was in. He considers it all to be sissy. He used to call me "Little Nancy" whenever I would talk about a movie or a play. When my mother would take me back home after seeing a Robert Taylor film, he would say, "Well, Little Nancy, did you like watching the pretty man?"

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Eh. I can see why you wouldn't want to be too free with your opinions, at least with your father. I hope you called him "Flatfoot" in response.

THE BOY: I'm sorry about your friend Andrew. But I do have an opinion about something.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Well, by all means, share it.

THE BOY: I think the ice pick is a bad idea.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Well, there are some days I have nothing to pick from but bad ideas.

THE BOY: I have a question, too.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: What?

THE BOY: How did you get into the army if you are a homosexual?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: I lied to them, of course. When they asked, "Are you a homosexual," I said "No." I mean, it's not like I was fondling other soldiers as they slept. Nobody ever knew, or, in truth, if they knew, they didn't care. There was a war on. You still thinking of joining the army?

THE BOY: Yes.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Want to go to Cuba and fight some communists?

THE BOY: Anywhere.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Anywhere but here, eh?

THE BOY: Anywhere but here.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Honestly, look into the USO. Sooner or later there will be another war on, and they are going to want somebody to sing to the troops. You have a real talent, son.

THE BOY: Thank you.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Do you mind if we don't discuss all this awfulness any more.

THE BOY: No.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: It is your night, after all. Enjoy it.

THE BOY: It's Robert Taylor's night.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: So enjoy that. But let's sit in silence. I won't bother you with my thoughts of ice picks, and you can entertain your own thoughts of Robert Taylor, which are far more enjoyable, anyway.

*(They sit in silence for a while. The boy breaks it.)*

THE BOY: Do you know what?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: What?

THE BOY: I don't like silence very much.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN: Two opinions in one evening. You're off to a good start, kid.

END